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RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 0521
RUEHYN/AMEMBASSY SANAA PRIORITY 0197
RUEHMIL/AMCONSUL MILAN PRIORITY 0285
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ROME 001177

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IT](#) [AF](#) [PK](#) [LE](#) [UN](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES UNIFIL, AFGHANISTAN AND
PAKISTAN WITH FM FRATTINI

REF: A. STATE 105467
[1](#)B. MADRID 1019
[1](#)C. STATE 108183
[1](#)D. ROME 1122

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Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Elizabeth Dibble for Reasons 1.4
(B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary: In a meeting with Ambassador Thorne on October 22, FM Frattini said Italy is willing to extend General Graziano's command of UNIFIL for up to nine months at the current troop level of 2,300, as long as the request comes from the UNSYG. He congratulated the U.S. for convincing Karzai to accept a second ballot, and said Italy was prepared to increase troop levels from the current level of 3,100 to up to 3,500 in Afghanistan if NATO requests it by the end of the year. Italy will move quickly to disburse its Euro 75 million pledge to Pakistan, and is likely to support Tony Blair for European Council President once the Lisbon Treaty is signed. End Summary.

UNIFIL: Italy Prepared to Extend for Nine Months, Provided
UNSYG Asks

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[1](#)2. (C/NF) Ambassador Thorne met with FM Franco Frattini for 45 minutes on October 22. He delivered Ref A points supporting Lebanon's request that Italy retain command of UNIFIL for another six to twelve months after January 2010 and maintain its current troop level of 2,300. Frattini said he had spoken to MOD La Russa about the matter recently and they had agreed that Italy would respond positively to a request to retain UNIFIL Commander Graziano for up to nine

additional months at the current troop level, provided the request comes directly from the UN Secretary General. According to Frattini, PM Berlusconi had made a personal and political commitment to PM Zapatero to support the Spanish bid for the command as long as Spain was able to fill the gap left by departing Italian troops. Whenever the Spanish take over the command, Frattini said Italy will lower its troop level to 1,700. (Note: Spain currently has about 1,100 troops in UNIFIL and is planning on increasing to about 1,400 upon assuming the command. Therefore, in order to avoid a net drop in UNIFIL troop strength, Spain would have provide an additional 300 or so troops to meet Italy half way at 1,700 troops each. End Note.) Italy is convinced of the value of maintaining the current level of European troops in UNIFIL rather than supplementing any Spanish shortfall with non-European troops.

13. (C/NF) Frattini added that, for domestic reasons, it would be helpful to make it known in the media that the U.S., UN, Lebanon and Israel support an extension of Graziano's mandate in order to overcome the objections of Italy's powerful Finance Minister Giulio Tremonti, who wishes to cut back on Italy's overseas deployments for budgetary reasons.

Afghanistan: Italy Prepared to Respond Positively to NATO Troop Request

14. (C) Turning to Afghanistan, Frattini congratulated the U.S. -- and Senator Kerry in particular -- on the successful effort to convince Karzai to accept a second ballot. Afghan FM Spanta had told Frattini a few days before the

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announcement that Karzai would not, in fact, accept. Frattini added that if NATO makes a decision that more resources are required, by the end of the year (when the Italian budget authorization for overseas deployments is up for renewal), Italy will give serious consideration to the request and the 500 extra Election Security Forces (ESF) currently on the ground will remain in place. Italy is prepared to maintain a troop level of up to 3,500 troops, including ESF. (Note: Italy currently has 3,100 troops in Afghanistan). NATO SYG Rasmussen's recent comments in praise of Italian efforts in Afghanistan had been well-received in Italy.

15. (S/NF) The Ambassador noted that the furor had died down over the October 15 Times of London article alleging Italian protection money payments in Afghanistan in 2008. Frattini said that his PermRep at NATO, Ambassador Stefanini, had informed him that the new intel fusion center planned for RC-West would help ensure that Italian forces receive the intel necessary to perform their tasks, thus removing the motivation for Italy's requirement that Rome be given 6 hours to respond to any request from COMISAF to deploy Italian troops outside of RC-West or RC-Capital.

Pakistan: Italy To Disburse Euro 75 Million Tokyo Pledge ASAP

16. (SBU) The Ambassador delivered Ref C points urging expeditious disbursement of Italy's Tokyo Donor Conference pledges in support of Pakistan. Frattini said that two of the three components of the Italian aid package for Pakistan had been approved by the MFA's development assistance governing board and should be disbursed shortly. The third has yet to be approved but should be soon. Together the three components total Euro 75 million. (Note: this is greater than the total previously reported of Euro 62 million (Ref D). Post will confirm with Italian aid officials and report septel. End Note).

Middle East: Saudis Concerned About Yemeni Refugees Linked to al Qaeda

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¶17. (C) Frattini said he is in the midst of a busy period on the Middle East: Jordan's King Abdullah and PA President Abu Mazen had just visited Italy, and the Gulf Cooperation Council is currently holding its "GCC Days" meeting in Rome. Frattini had recently returned to a trip to Riyadh -- where the Saudis expressed concern over unrest in Yemen causing al Qaeda-linked refugees to cross into the Kingdom and even infiltrate the government -- and had suggested that the GCC should consider inviting Yemen to join. Frattini will travel next to UAE before proceeding to Marrakech to co-host the Forum for the Future.

European Presidency: Italy Willing to Support Blair; Germanic Counterbalance Needed
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¶18. (C) Turning to Europe, Frattini said that Italy can support Blair for the EU Council Presidency, despite concerns over Britain's outlier stance vis-a-vis the EU (not being a member of the Euro Zone or the Schengen Zone), in part because Blair's influence would counterbalance the Euroskeptic tendencies of a Cameron government. He noted

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that the Italian Ambassador in London was shocked when UK shadow Foreign Secretary Hague met with a group of EU Ambassadors to caution them against supporting Blair's candidacy. Frattini said the biggest challenge to Blair comes from the Germans, who want a German-speaking President. The EU six (UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Poland) will meet soon to discuss the way ahead under the Lisbon Treaty, and speculated that if a German-speaker replaces Solana as EU High Representative, it would strike the right balance: a Portuguese President of the Commission, a British President of the European Council, and a Germanic High Representative. Possible candidates for the latter post include former Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schussel and former Austrian FM Ursula Plassnik.
THORNE